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Designing legacy and the legacy of design: London 2012 and the Regeneration Games

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This paper considers the environmental and social sustainability of the Olympic regeneration area, examining process and delivery in terms of scale, context and process.

Designing legacy and the legacy of design: London 2012 and the Regeneration Games

Graeme Evans

The design of an urban area chosen to host a mega-event such as the Summer Olympics begs fundamental questions of scale, process and context. Not least since this is an international event whose physical impact is highly localised, where the tension between ‘permanent’ architecture, landscape and the temporal is being played out over an extended period of time. This paper covers the period from 2003 when the UK bid for the 2012 Games, followed by its award in 2005, from when the construction, compulsory land purchase and clean-up exercise began in earnest. Writing in the initial post-event legacy stage of this major placemaking project means that assessing any notions of sustainability and regeneration – and the role of design therein – is necessarily provisional. Current visions and plans produced by the agencies responsible for transforming this event site into an established community project forward until 2030 so, in regeneration terms, a twenty-five year process is under way.

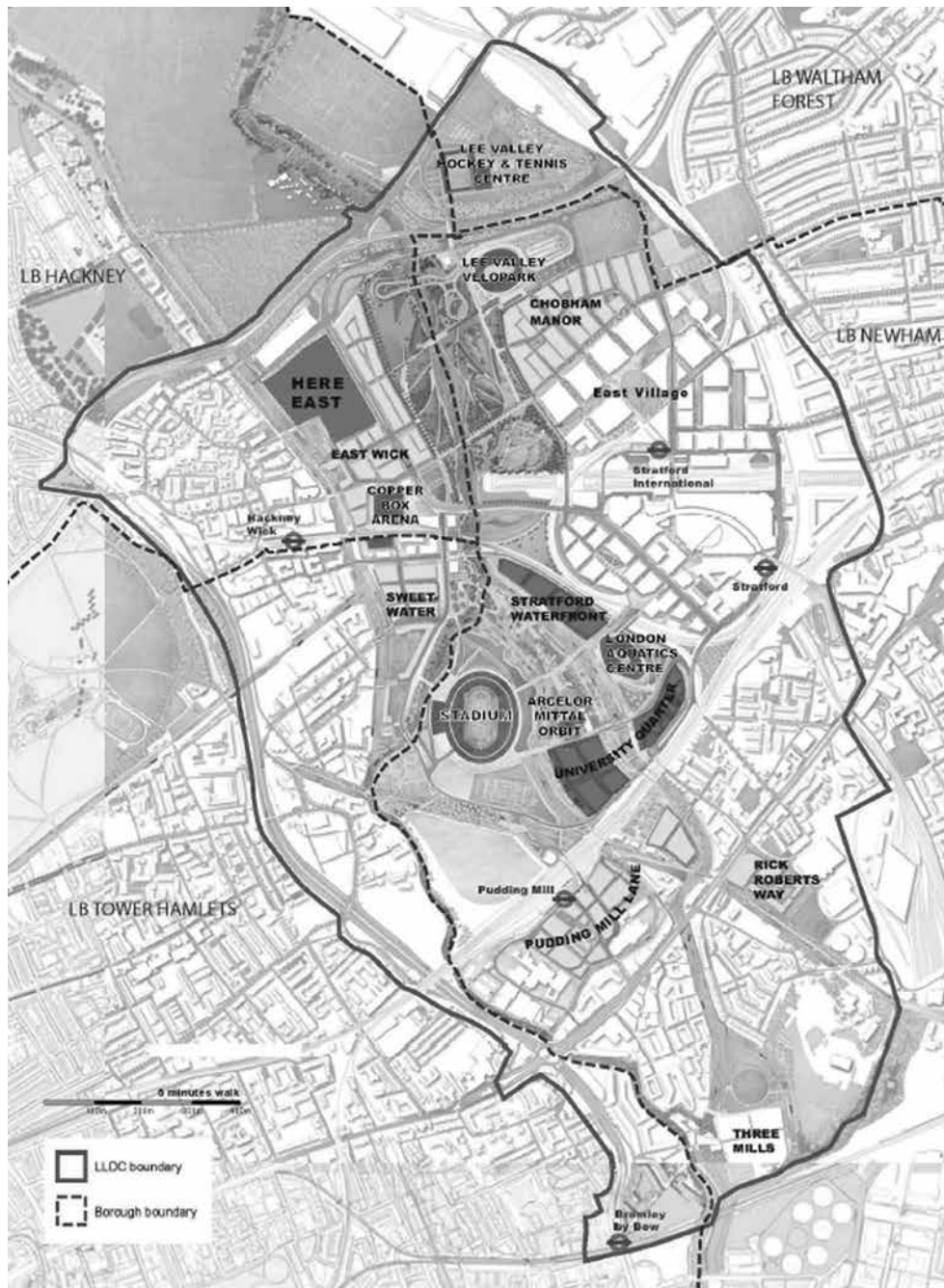
Historically, this latest phase also represents the ‘unfinished business’ of the preceding London Docklands Development Corporation which had presided over the development of Canary Wharf and other inner docklands areas between 1979 and 1993, and the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation that had taken over planning powers from incumbent local authorities in 2005 until it was wound up in 2012 in the spirit of ‘localism’. In the subsequent decade before London’s Olympic bid, area-based regeneration programmes had continued in this area¹ while, strategically, the Lower Lea Valley had been designated as a key sub-regional regeneration area in successive London Plans crossing borough boundaries, as the Mayor’s new Olympic Legacy authority the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) – also with land-use planning powers – now operates within these designated areas of the London Boroughs (LBs) of Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest [1]. Straddling changing political (national, city), policy and economic regimes also means that this mega-development has been influenced by shifting approaches to urban regeneration, while

acknowledging that such a mega-event has required a singular focus and political consensus which in many respects defies normal governance and planning processes.

Critical assessments of the new Olympic designs have so far been left to reportage in commissioned ‘commemorative’ books on the architecture and design process – and its sustainability² – and where: ‘the control by LOCOG over the press coverage of the Games has probably dictated that there is little or no room for critique on its documentation for London 2012, leaving the Olympic Park coming out smelling of roses’.³ The official narrative of the Olympic site is now largely controlled by the Mayor’s Legacy Corporation and by developers in the current property and placemaking phase. This paper therefore considers the context and processes by which the design and planning of the Lower Lea Valley/Olympic ‘Legacy’ Park progressed. In particular, I will look at how this has been manifested through the multi-scalar masterplans and related consultation and ‘urban quarterisation’ processes, and through the various metaphors adopted to support the overall regeneration and design vision. Key concepts which featured in early masterplans and in subsequent development statements and design briefs include ‘stitching together’ (‘a tear in the city’s urban fabric’);⁴ ‘convergence’ (‘within twenty years, the communities which hosted the 2012 Games will have the same social and economic chances as their neighbours across London’);⁵ and creating a ‘new city/urban district’ and destination.

Scale – the masterplans

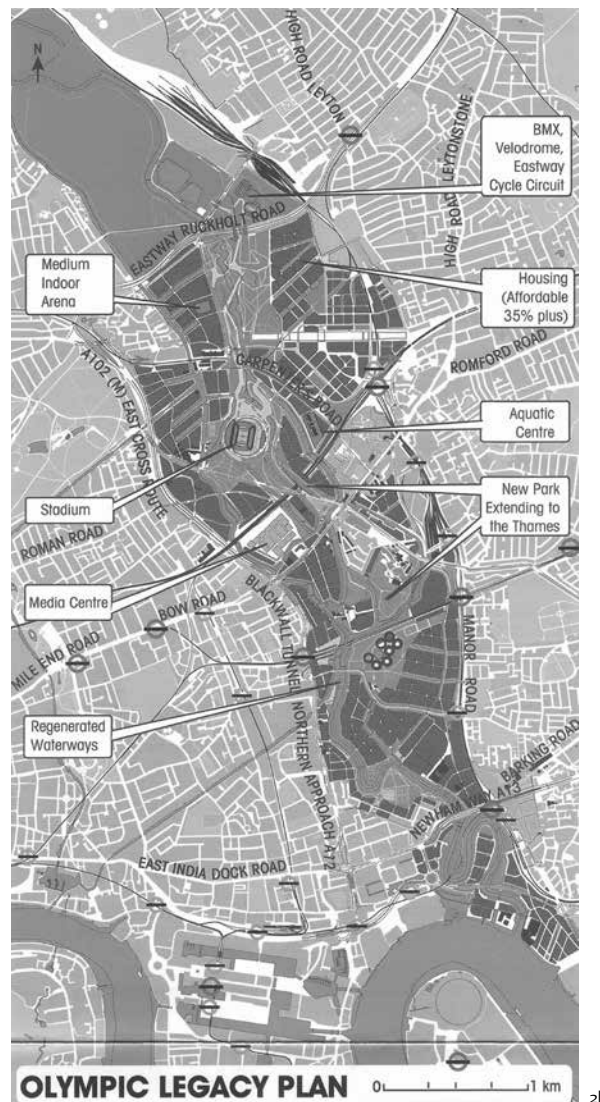
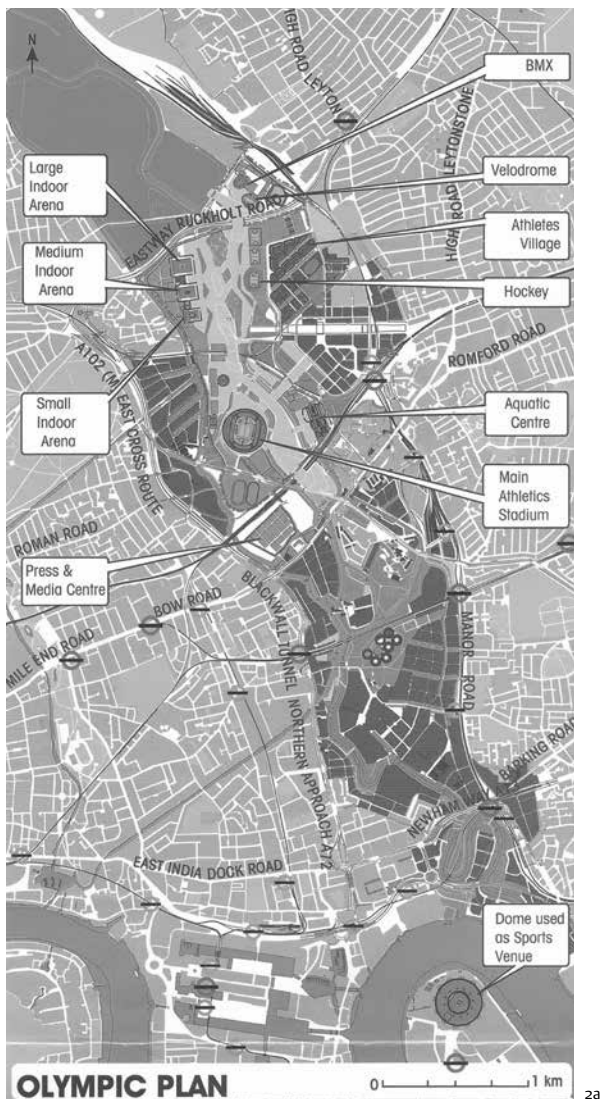
Gonzales refers to ‘scalar narratives’ of regeneration, and the tension between the need for a ‘spatial fix’ on the one hand, and the reality that scales are socially constructed and therefore not fixed, but ‘perpetually redefined, contested and restructured’ on the other.⁶ Administrative and development boundaries also shifted in the case of the Olympic / Lower Lea Valley. A strict scale hierarchy has however operated in the visioning and planning of this extended development area, led by the masterplan,



- 1 Olympic Park Special Planning Guidance area and development zones
- 2 Olympic and Legacy Masterplan

the first of which was seen in the 2003 version used to inform the pre-award bid. Larger area plans were available previously for the Lower Lea Valley, however, and in the London Plan using various zoning, priority area and land-use typologies, which are also reflected in local borough plans. Here designation of areas targeted for regeneration and particular land-use development – employment/industry, housing, recreation and transport – formed the foundation for Olympic area masterplanning. Urban design schemes were then commissioned within the masterplan which largely dealt with landscaping, including water engineering, infrastructure (e.g. bridges) and requisite land preparation of what was highly contaminated soil and requiring the removal of surface structures such as more than fifty electricity pylons. These in turn provided the framework for specific facilities required for the Olympics themselves, i.e. sports stadiums and

athletes' housing. As EDAW's lead masterplanner states: 'the proposals set a new standard of urban design in the UK. They establish a series of layers each of which can act as an individual programme but which can also be brought together to create a total design'.⁷ The Olympic Park/Village should not be seen in isolation however, since Stratford, the main transport and retail hub for the development, was already the subject of town centre and transport design schemes, including new housing, notably Stratford City and the Westfield shopping centre. This £2bn commercial development received planning approval in 2002, three years prior to the Olympic bid. Largely retail-led, the borough had managed to secure high-density housing, a school and some office space, although not what could be termed an integrated mixed-use new-build development such as Brindleyplace Birmingham, or the more organic mix of an urban village such as Clerkenwell. Design



firms active in the Olympic development such as Studio Egret West were also engaged in public realm and placemaking projects in Stratford's town centre and existing cultural quarter, which had adopted through LB Newham a boosterist, urban design-led approach, influenced by town-centre regeneration and pedestrian schemes such as Camden Lock and Birmingham city centre. Over £80m had been invested in public-realm projects around the fringes of the Park prior to the 2012 Games with more than £300m in regeneration funding being received by LB Newham between 1996 and 2004.

Only after this iteration - Masterplan / Urban Design / Quarterisation - did individual sites, buildings and structures feature in futuristic graphics and fly-throughs, with consortia-based commissions for specific buildings, from the iconic Olympic facilities - temporary, semi-permanent and permanent - to utilities (e.g. energy, recycling) and housing. Semi-permanent structures refer to those that would be substantially converted after their Olympic use, e.g. athletes' housing, main athletics stadium, press and broadcasting centre, with several buildings designed to be removed/recycled altogether, such as the handball and basketball arenas. This met one of the aims of sustainability

in terms of legacy use or, rather, avoiding under-use/redundancy. The primacy of the masterplan thus invites some critique, since this visualised the overall regeneration and legacy concept and rationale for both the location decisions and subsequent public investment. In a recent Urban Design Group (UDG) seminar, the headline brief made a clear statement of the importance of the 'new' masterplan model:

The conventional masterplanning model is dead, long live the masterplan! Reinvigorated as an adaptive multidisciplinary instrument closely related to the wide-ranging complexities of contemporary life, the masterplan, with its precise deliberations and processes, has gained a fresh significance.

Its role as a 'change agent' was also seen to be 'of pivotal importance - the masterplan as a hands-on cultural framework which doesn't alienate people, responding to urban environments as organisms in continual evolution [with] the power to foster potentials, and a better sense of ownership, along with a new resilience in the faces of multiple challenges'.⁸ This ambitious perspective is significant since the seminar was made up of design firms who were heavily involved in the Olympic site and legacy developments, including

Muf Architecture/Art, Studio Egret West, and Karakusevic Carson Architects who serve on Design for London (the Mayor's 'team of place-shaping experts') Urban Design, Masterplanning and Architecture framework panels. This engagement therefore goes beyond specific building/urban design commissions, to providing design guidance and assessment.⁹

The initial visioning process for the London 2012 Olympics relied heavily on masterplans at key stages. This commenced with the pre-award consultations with local residents and 'stakeholders'. This task had been contracted to planning firm EDAW (subsequently acquired by the global AECOM in 2005) who engaged architects Fluid¹⁰ to lead on community engagement. During late 2003 three sets of 'with' and 'without' Olympics masterplans were issued, in an iterative process following each round of consultation with local and transport authorities.

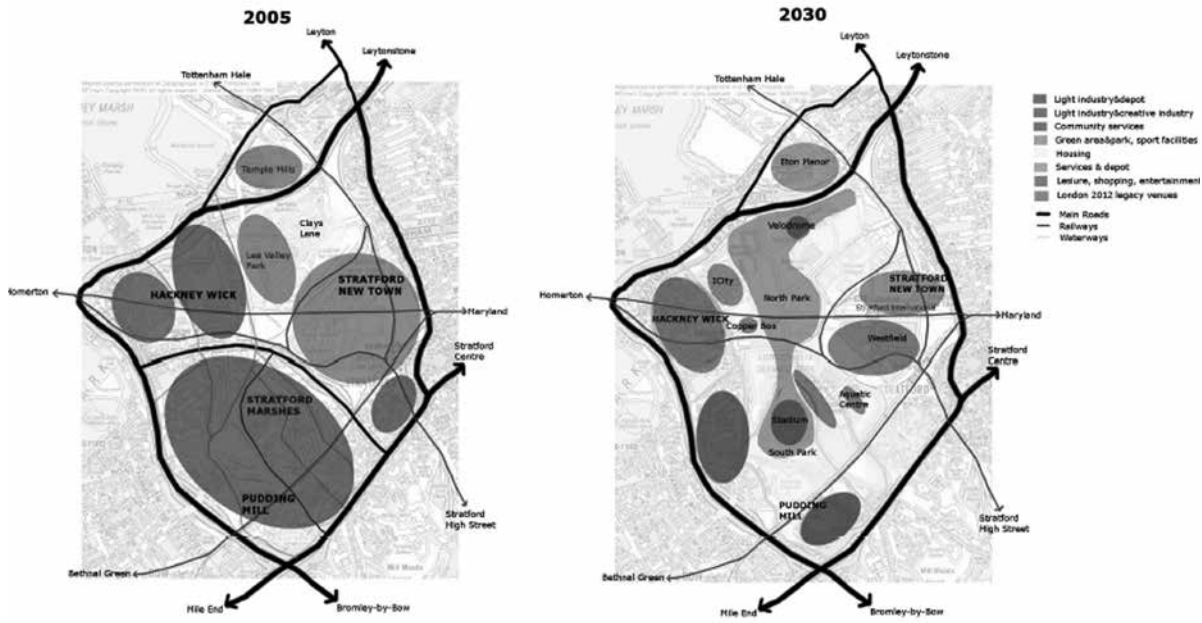
These early plans were simplified graphic schemata [2] to be followed by more sophisticated GIS-based maps, CGI images and 'artist impressions' [3], showing Olympic and Legacy modes. These formed a central part of roadshows that visited local communities in 'host boroughs' (LBs Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest, to be joined by Barking & Dagenham). These were attended by local residents including children who were presented with large-scale maps, as well as Mac-based interactive designs (preferred by the children in attendance). Residents were keen to locate themselves on these maps and to assess the impact on their area, as well as new connections and changes to the landscape/views and amenities. Following the award of the Olympics to London in July 2005, the same team was selected in 2006 by the ODA to devise a masterplan for the Olympic Park with a remit to design the infrastructure, including utilities, waterways/drainage, landscape, platforms for venues, roads and bridges.¹¹ The EDAW-led consortium included engineers Buro Happold and architects Allies and Morrison, Foreign Office and Populous, with Arup supplying cost and Atkins ground, water and engineering services. This was an early case of what Raco terms a 'utopian top-down model of contractual management'¹² which was reinforced by the newly established CLM consortium,¹³ formed to deliver the construction on behalf of the ODA, with widespread contractual powers.

This initial masterplan identified the scheme as a major catalyst for change and regeneration in east London, especially the Lea Valley, leveraging resources, spurring timely completion of already-programmed infrastructure investment and leaving a legacy to be valued by future generations. Thus confirming the Olympics as the acceleration of an already-targeted area regeneration programme. The Athletes' Village (renamed 'East Village'), designed to temporarily house 17,800 visitors, for instance, had been relocated from the original plan further south to better integrate with the Stratford City development, thus allowing the accommodation to be delivered through the already-planned



housing provision, and allowing building to start earlier. In January 2008 the then lead body, the London Development Agency (LDA) awarded a new seventeen-member consortium led again by EDAW with the addition of architecture/landscape design firms such as Caruso St John, KCAP, Vogt Landscape, McDowell+Benedetti and Haworth Tompkins to design the Olympic legacy masterplan framework. This included new housing, schools, health facilities and workspaces within the wider legacy site. By 2010, however, criticism of this masterplan's housing strategy led to the further commissioning of a nine-strong team of practices, including Maccreeanor Lavington, Panter Hudspith with Witherford Watson Mann, and landscape architects West 8, to draw up a revised legacy plan, replacing 'bland' contemporary residential blocks, with designs inspired by traditional London Georgian terraces (e.g. Maida Vale). This did, however, reduce the homes target from 10,000 to 8000, to be further reduced in 2014.

The LLDC has full land-use planning powers for the delineated area [1] and its own Local Plan, with the Legacy masterplan forming the spatial framework. This is visualised in the next generation of masterplans which compare the current view with impressions in 2030 as illustrated in area diagrams which show the land-use zones around the new park [4] and, secondly, an aerial perspective showing the 2030 virtual view south from Hackney Marshes, contrasted here with the actual view prior to the Olympic development in 2003 [5]. This shows the extent of open green/space in this 'brownfield' site, and the further urbanisation of the area which seeks to create an exemplary case of sustainable development.



3 Olympic Masterplan 4 Zonal diagrams, 2005 and 2030 5 a, b Olympic development area/ Park, 2003 and 2030

Process – a sustainable development?

These iterative plans did not alter the fundamental scheme – the Athletes’ Village had been slightly reduced to ‘save’ 80 local businesses/1000 local jobs from relocation¹⁴ and the press/broadcast and media centre [3] had also been re-sited from its original planned location at Pudding Mill Lane to the west, near Hackney Wick and within the Park security area. This placed the temporary-use venue within LB Hackney, rather than LB Newham. From the initial consultation, this process diverged from any notion of ‘generative urban design’, as promoted by Christopher Alexander and others¹⁵ who have argued against ‘simplifying mechanisms such as large-scale diagrammatic concepts, rigid typologies, or schemata’, seeing urban design as a ‘continuous evolutionary response to a complex environment of urban conditions, and view(ing) the designer’s role not to specify the final form, but rather the intermediate process that will generate that form.’¹⁶ As Alexander Cuthbert reminds us, ‘urban design is not merely the art of designing cities, but the knowledge of how cities grow and change [...] we must go beyond abstract social science into the realm of human experience and the creative process’.¹⁷ A particular weakness of the masterplan-led system which drives subsequent urban design and building/plot developments, however, is the lack of fine grain understanding and visualisation ‘from below’ in terms of land-uses, social, economic and temporal uses/flows, and residents’ actual experience of their environment and amenity values as well as their interrelationships. These are inadequately reflected in the data and superficial ‘site analysis’, which is



5a



5b

in contrast to the geotechnical and tectonic focus of the sustainable Olympics site development and construction effort. In particular, no scenarios showing alternatives, interactive models or cost-benefit analysis appear to have been made. As Michael Mehaffy concludes: 'in an age of critical ecology and economic challenges, in which human technology seems at nearly irreconcilable odds with ecological sustainability, we must look at the way that natural systems use generative processes to achieve sustainable morphologies'.¹⁸

However, once the Summer 2012 Olympics were awarded to London, the consultation turned to information-giving, with the 'without Games' no longer an option (as had featured in the 2003 masterplans and local development plans). Once land assembly and planning started in earnest, public consultation in some observers' view turned out to be 'a shallow charm offensive; a gaggle of professionals trying to persuade people that their plans will cleverly solve chronic problems of local underdevelopment and neglect'.¹⁹ In particular, soon to be displaced groups 'felt that their expressed needs and positive suggestions were misunderstood and/or ignored'²⁰ (see: Marrero-Guillamón, *arq* 18.4, pp. 367–376). In host borough focus group meetings held before the Games, this sentiment was confirmed by residents. When asked whether they felt included and were well represented by the London 2012 organisations about the regeneration decisions, the majority said 'No':²¹

'No, I don't think you feel included at all, do you, where it's all already decided ...';

'There's always an Olympic store, and you can get leaflets and see what's going on and so on, but it's information – it's not actually asking. The thing is information doesn't mean inclusion!';

'Ultimately, they've come with a menu that's already decided. They didn't let us pick the menu, the menu itself was already decided, and then, as the time's gone by, you'll see that a lot of dishes on the menu aren't available any more. And there's a few left that the local community has a say on. So the other day we did a consultation, most of us were there, it wasn't a consultation it was 'This is what's happening, like it or lump it';

'Never heard about any meetings before, while these planning decisions are taking [place]? 'Cause these meetings were much more informative than participative, no?''²²

Symbolically, the Olympic masterplans and CGI images present a utopian vision in response to what is a somewhat dystopian narrative of a helplessly deprived, fragmented and semi-derelict sub-region of London. This is reinforced in the media: 'The Olympic site was created in a poor and desolate part of London'²³; and headlines such as 'from wasteland to outstanding winner',²⁴ as well as consistently in policy and development rationales. 'Wasteland', normally a pejorative term, has a more positive meaning however in terms of biodiversity: 'these (Olympic sites) are among very few wasteland sites anywhere in London protected by nature

conservation designations. Wastelands in this part of London are nationally important communities of invertebrates, and support plant communities, which reflect the cultural history of the area.'²⁵

The pluralist model of regime theory²⁶ suggests that, through multiple stakeholders, power over decision-making and resources is more equitably distributed, that minority and small, special-interest groups can influence outcomes. While the masterplanning process may appear consensual, the physical end-product may be less so. While masterplanners, star architects and intermediaries are brought in to create a vision of place, evidence of local and community influence on the shape and content of regeneration schemes is rare.²⁷ Writing on waterfront regeneration, Keith Bassett acknowledges that 'the final masterplan is still within the broad parameters laid down at the very beginning by the planning brief'.²⁸ This was largely the case with the Olympic masterplan process which mirrored the concept and contextual basis for this mega-project. In this sense it is a predictable outcome, not least due to the instrumental nature of the project (driven by an external 'client')²⁹ once the political decision had been made to bid for the event, and to then rationalise this within an already designated regeneration zone, further rationalised (in order to justify the very large public spending required) by the legacy prospects. This heightened further as the capital budget had to be increased threefold and as public leverage of private investment faltered, when the national economy moved into recession.

Legacy promises therefore became a key focus for political and media arenas, effectively justifying through 'deferred gratification' the entire project and its short and medium-term impacts. In addition to sporting, tourism and cultural targets, national and regional government promised a 'sustainable games', 'developing sustainable communities',³⁰ and 'making the Olympic Park a blueprint for sustainable living',³¹ while local host boroughs looked for a 'nexus with physical regeneration; developing successful neighbourhoods'. The original bid referred to the concept of a 'One Planet Olympics', and this focused on five sustainability themes: climate change, waste, biodiversity, inclusion, and healthy living. London's Olympic site development included green building measures like water recycling, halving the carbon footprint of all construction projects, and sourcing 25% of each project's materials from recycled sources. However, as the Games drew closer, 'officials noticeably distanced themselves from their original targets, focusing on "reducing" and "mitigating" the carbon footprint of the Games.'³² The government's official Olympic Impact Study pre-Games report using approximately 60 indicator sets had found 'below average performance for the environmental outcomes indicators' as well as social outcomes indicators, with gains yet to be measured from Olympic facility life-cycle and energy consumption analysis.³³ The next study is due to be carried out



6

by 2015. Following the wind-up of LOCOG this, curiously, falls to the British Olympic Committee. In terms of evaluation, post-occupancy studies of both housing and other spaces and buildings, and perhaps applying CABE's Design Quality Indicator assessment tool, would provide a more triangulated study of how far the sustainable design and communities goals have been met, once legacy use and new facilities/housing have been established.

This major 'brownfield' redevelopment project has thus prioritised sustainable design and construction, with a strong emphasis on recycling materials and 'clean-up' of water courses [6]. Like the travellers groups, allotments, the residents of Clays Lane housing, Carpenter's Road artists' studios and local businesses, many fish were also 'relocated', thus reducing biodiversity in this respect. A new one-hectare habitat was created in Hackney Marshes. However, the Lower Lea also suffers from de-oxygenation due to road run-off washing into the river when it rains and household waste water and sewage effluent leeching into the river.³⁴ Concrete and metal sidings also limit the growth of aquatic vegetation and habitats, which perhaps conflicts with the preferred controlled landscape design of regenerated waterways.

While some 'green' opportunities such as the use of canals for the transport of supplies, and the recycling of electricity pylons, were not fully realised, steel tubes in the Stadium trusses were sourced on the surplus steel market, and the View Tube facility on the Greenway was constructed from recycled shipping containers, while the energy centre CCHP plant powers heating to Park reducing carbon emissions by c. 20%. The ODA's 2007 targets were ambitious: BREEAM Excellent rating, Athletes' Village 25% more energy efficient than Part L of

the Building Regulations and achieving EcoHomes Excellent standard, with renewable energy meeting 20% of demand by 2013, and Olympic venues 40% and housing 20% reductions in potable water over industry standards. 90% by weight of demolition material was to be reused or recycled – over 98% was achieved, but largely through recycling not reuse. 80% of the excavated 1.4 cubic metres of treated soil were, however, reused on site with several innovative water recycling schemes installed.

It has been estimated that the predicted building environment targets will have been met and (forecast to be) exceeded in many cases, although actual performance in use will need to be assessed, for example, in the 2015 OIS post-event report. As Hattie Hartman says: 'a major question mark remains over how rigorously the OPLC [now the LLDC] will be able to adhere to the ODA's ambitious sustainability agenda when it comes to the Stadium refurbishment, new housing and reuse of the press buildings'.³⁵ The scale, and of course budget, of the development provided the opportunity for exemplary levels of sustainable building design, however the immovable deadline also meant that compromises had to be made in the design of the venues. Plans to install a wind turbine to the north of the Olympic Park were cancelled and the gas-powered district heating contract of forty years' duration has excluded the opportunity for renewable energy generation and a symbolic profile for the Park.

The integration, as well as the separation of the parklands and open spaces from the occupied and intensively used areas, will determine how successful this major piece of urban design becomes. These spaces will face pressure from their promotion as an event space (and fivefold residential population

increase), and as a space for peace and quiet and an antidote to the more densified and intensified Stratford City (see: Smith, *arq* 18.4, pp. 315–323). The park does, however, lack shelter, as visitors found during rainy days at the Games, with only the sponsors' crowded franchises available. Sun protection should also be a priority in view of climate change and skin cancer concerns. Examples such as the canalside Parc de La Villette, Paris, show how architecturally interesting covered walkways (designed by Bernard Tschumi) can provide both protection and wayfinding, which the current Olympic Park lacks. Here the wide approach routes designed for mass access tend to produce a sterile and illegible space, while the approach from Stratford towards the Park is pedestrian-unfriendly with overbearing high-rise blocks (the twenty-four-storey Unite student tower, designed by BDP, shortlisted for the Building Design's Cup 'Carbuncle' building of the year in 2014), and the backs of the Westfield John Lewis and multi-storey car parks.

Context – sustainable communities and neighbourhoods

The placemaking strategy and sustainable development vision rests on the communities who will directly benefit from this improved environment, notably the Park and other legacy amenities, including incumbent and new residents of the Olympic and Lower Lea housing. Placemaking as a concept can be problematic in practice since it can presume that no 'place' (and community – past and present) exists, or at least, is in need of external regeneration and renewal. This commonly manifests itself through urban design, event and destination-making interventions. This approach also conflates design with place branding as applied in city branding and destination marketing.³⁶ The Olympic regeneration and legacy strategy does seem to confuse placemaking with branding, creating a 'visitor destination benefiting all Londoners' – and reconciling this with *host communities* who were to be the prime beneficiaries in the original Olympic bid: 'the regeneration of an entire community for the direct benefit of everyone who lives there'.³⁷ The LLDC's current priorities do not distinguish communities in this respect: 'through design quality to create a unique and inspiring place for events, leisure, sport and culture, a hub for enterprise and innovation, and diverse sustainable communities'.³⁸ More so than the Park landscape and retained Olympic facilities, housing is key to fulfilling these sustainable community objectives.

As noted, housing development was already under way in Stratford and in a number of canalside developments, so the Athletes' (now, 'East') Village represents the first true legacy example, providing 2800 homes with a mix of private-affordable (50:50) housing, academy school and polyclinic. Cost and timing has meant that compromises to the original masterplan had to be made – four- to eight-storey blocks were planned, then standardised blocks of six to twelve were envisaged, to be finally limited to eight to ten based on a precast 'chassis' design,

producing a uniform and currently sterile exterior, as Rowan Moore comments: 'the dogmatic belief that the ideal form for cities is a grid of regular ten storey blocks concurred with developers' desires to build large, repetitive structures. The result is a robotic approximation of urbanity, in which curves and oblique lines are barely admitted, like a portrait drawn with an Etch A Sketch'.³⁹ While design engineering has led the construction and environmental sustainability effort, social engineering in terms of 'mixed communities' is manifested firstly in access to housing. Here, the idea of 'affordability' needs to be unpacked. Promises of 35% affordable housing in Olympic legacy housing was made up of affordable rent, shared ownership and social rent. This target has already been reduced in the case of the Chobham Manor area due to open in 2016 [7]. It has also been reduced to 30% (from 40% target) in the new canalside urban villages (1500 dwellings) of East Wick and Sweetwater.

While the *dirigiste* architectural style of the Olympic Village housing (designed by sixteen separate design firms and 'masterplanned' by Fletcher Priest Architects) was dictated by time and temporary usage constraints, the newly adapted housing offers a wider range, including family houses at lower densities than first envisaged – one response to the original masterplan that looked to higher density/rise blocks. New urban villages in Hackney Wick [1] are situated by the canal and between the Press Centre building (*Here East*) with front doors onto the Park [8], as the OPLC promised in their revised plans: 'Homes inspired by the best of London's heritage [...] terraced housing [...] traditional townhouses and mews along canals; a focus on more family homes and not all high rise units'.⁴⁰

A further 1000 planned homes have been cut, however, from the revised Legacy plan (now 7000) to accommodate a new 'cultural hub' which includes outposts of the V&A Museum and UCL, with headline claims of 10,000 jobs and an economic impact of billions. The Mayor's rationale for this trade-off is that it would lead to more homes being built in the future. This is another indication of both the deferred gratification and city branding that risks undermining social sustainability. Affordability is also a serious misnomer since for actual property purchase the value of a one-bed apartment would require borrowing of five times the average earnings for a Newham resident, while affordable rent can represent 80% of market rates under current government guidelines.

Housing density varies from high-rise apartment blocks to planned lower-density three- to four-storey housing, including three/four/five bed homes. Standard density per hectare (dph) measures of density are however of limited value in this context, where trade-offs in terms of views, accessibility and amenities ('ambient density')⁴¹ may compensate for lower space standards and lack of private gardens.⁴² The relative low densities of Hackney Wick, for instance, have limited the generation of

7 a and b Athletes' housing and Chobham Manor site (with athletes' housing in the distance)

8 Artist's impression, north Park housing



7a



7b

local shops and community facilities which have further disadvantaged the local community who lack easy access outwards e.g. the elderly and young families.⁴³ Here and in the new blocks of Stratford City, how far neighbourhood level facilities can be supported and financed is not yet clear, but without the range of community amenities required for everyday existence and social exchange, these developments will otherwise emulate the sterile Docklands and failed mixed- (or dual-) use schemes with vacant/undeveloped ground floors, which were prevalent in the 2000s housing boom. Hackney, of all London boroughs, suffered most from this combination of market and public (planning) failure.⁴⁴

The masterplans made great play of linking or 'stitching together' the west with the eastern boundaries of the Park, which were seen to be

divided by the Lea river and canals, A-roads and, by implication, the communities themselves. This is represented by the already regenerating Stratford (LB Newham) and new rail terminus, Westfield centre and high rises, and the post-industrial neighbourhoods of Hackney Wick (LB Hackney), Fish Island (LB Tower Hamlets) and Pudding Mill (LB Newham) where new 'urban villages' and schools are planned [1]. This east-west divide is reinforced in urban design assessments such as *Stitching the Wick* and *Stitching the Fringe*.⁴⁵ However, this is an Olympic-centric view of this 'fringe' area, which has its own character, history and morphology and looks west to the open space of Victoria Park as much as the Olympic Park. Even today, residents do not connect to the Park or Stratford centre (despite quick rail links), with barriers perceived around safety, cyclists ('traffic') vs. pedestrians ('peace & quiet'),

and an encroaching control of community based facilities, as national agencies such as the Canals & Rivers Trust take over management and control of locally run amenities. From our recent workshop with local residents, there is a clear spatial divide between the west and east neighbourhoods adjoining the Lea river/canal (and new park), despite newly created bridges and walkways. This is both 'territorial' and a reflection of safety and identity issues, including the fundamental environmental and architectural distinctions between Stratford and Hackney Wick & Fish Island.⁴⁶ This divide may harden as the new urban village communities take shape and if local amenities follow. Connectivity in this respect may produce a stitching together of this 'island' community with its borough and neighbours south and west, rather than east to Stratford.

The concept of stitching together urban fabrics, or fragments of 'broken' communities, is also resonant of many urban regeneration and urban design schemes, and is consonant with government social cohesion/inclusion objectives. The context of the Olympic site regeneration therefore includes the Sustainable Communities policies of the previous New Labour government, in particular, urban policies prioritising mixed-use, high density and compact city approaches to development.⁴⁷ Surprisingly, however, this project is largely based on mono-use structures. Mixed-use is also a more complex reality than the familiar development option (more often dual-use), encompassing temporal, as well as social (i.e. tenure, occupants) and economic use, and these dimensions do not seem to feature in either urban design or building design concepts in this case. Compactness was also an IOC imperative for the 'Games-time' Olympic Village and facilities; however, the neighbourhood-level approach under the former New Deal for Communities and Estate Renewal programmes is not enabled in the masterplanned approach, where it needs to be recognised that mega-event driven regeneration bypasses normal urban development, planning processes and rationality. This is evident firstly in the absence of the new Coalition government's Localism agenda around the Olympic development (based on 'sub-localism' – below the level of local government), and secondly in the accelerated development and land-use compromises in this initial Legacy stage. As P. Bernstock concludes: 'the real risk is that the area will be regenerated, but with very little benefit to those existing communities'.⁴⁸ From a survey of host boroughs carried out just prior to the Games,⁴⁹ only a minority thought that preparations had a positive impact on improved housing (28%), education, health and community facilities (26%), with more agreeing that parks and green spaces (39%) and the image of area (49%) had improved. Respondents also thought that crime, pollution, pressures on local amenities, as well as 'churn' would increase over the longer term – hardly an endorsement of the legacy of a 'sustainable community' that the project had promised.

Design practices such as Muf and Zac Monro

Architects have, however, been active in local public-realm and landscape projects in existing and planned housing estates and communities, and the LLDC's own design team continue to be proactive in landscape schemes such as the new Canal Park and Leaway 'Fatwalk'. It is at this level, in smaller community and public-realm schemes, that co-design is most evident. These include playgrounds and public-realm projects in existing spaces and estates, to new public art, and communal spaces on behalf of new housebuilders. Projects such as the Cre8 Lifestyle Centre (formerly the Hackney Community Centre and Eastway Swimming Baths) illustrate the embracing of post-Olympics sustainable legacy rhetoric: 'by bringing together community and business in order to facilitate the creation of collectively designed sustainable future'.⁵⁰ Proposals for Cre8's £11m 'Arc' development include two eco-builds using sustainable building techniques, reusing materials from dismantled sections from the temporary sides to the Aquatic Centre, increasing biodiversity and community food growing, as well as conserving energy and water.

Graham Farmer, writing on the practice of sustainable architecture, conceptualises sustainable design 'as a concrete practice whereby abstract technical concerns and social considerations seamlessly converge to produce concrete artefacts that fit specific contexts',⁵¹ distinguishing between three design approaches: de-contextualised practice; context-bound practice; and contextualising practice.

The first reflects much of the Olympic building to date, with a focus on technical performance and standards within a predetermined functional specification, but one created largely without user input. Few designers would claim to work context-free (an exception may be those iconic buildings that defy both internal logic and external context), but in this case, the context-bound emphasis on vernacular, locality and place, preservation/conservation, is at odds with much of the new-build, while landscaping likewise reflects a particular imported style and precedents (e.g. High Line, New York). How far 'indigenous' architecture could have informed the design is however, questionable, given the complexity and historical layering of what has been a much worked cityscape for many centuries. It will be at the very fine grain level and mix of usage and users (*usager* – a term Lefebvre introduced, but felt uncomfortable with) that the urban designs, and structures therein, achieve a sustainable balance – or not. The degree of democratic participation in technical design envisaged in contextualising practice goes much further in looking to the 'citizen architect' in place of the technical expert or designer: 'help to reframe design problems in a way that enables designers, constructors, users and crucially communities (to) confront environmental problems, learn about their (and others) values, beliefs and practices'.⁵² This would require a fundamental shift in the current planning and development system, but offers a more engaged version of 'localism' that supposedly drives our current mixed economy system, where the mix is determined by powers



8 Artist's impression,
north Park housing

(including designers) outside of local influence. Another challenge which the Olympic grand project faced is planning for communities who are not yet in-situ, placing greater responsibility on urban designers to scenario-build and innovate, based on a wider source of influence and knowledge – past and present – than has been practised or allowed in this case.

Coda – Back to the Future?

The 'without Olympics' option included in the pre-award consultation masterplans was effectively a Plan B which recognised the ongoing regeneration of the Lower Lea Valley, with already-planned Stratford City and transport interchanges, and the gradual recovery of the waterways which have been the subject of growing demand from boat-dwellers and recreation users, and as a value-added to canal-side property developments which have multiplied over the past decade. No real opportunity cost or counterfactual was presented in these visions and, once the award was made, any structural alternative was purely hypothetical – not 'if' but 'how' became the pragmatic mode of delivery, with some of the adjustments, compromises and incremental changes noted here. But a real architectural and social alternative was available for part of the Olympic site: Cedric Price's 1964 concept for Joan Littlewood's Fun Palace. This was planned to be located on an 'island' site at Mill Meads (now the site of the Aquatic Centre) based on a design model that was prescient in many ways: temporary and flexible, with: '[...] no permanent structures [...] no concrete stadia stained and cracking, no legacy of noble architecture, quickly

dating'.⁵³ Price's vision was for a 'new kind of active and dynamic architecture which would permit multiple uses and which would constantly adapt to change [...] thinking of the Fun Palace in terms of process, as events in time rather than objects in space'.⁵⁴ The building would have no single entry point and divide into activity zones. Price and Littlewood had assembled a multi-disciplinary team from architecture, art, theatre, technology, and even Situationists, with cybernetics and game theory driving the facility's day-to-day behaviour and performative strategies which would be stimulated through feedback from users. Price's influential design, although adopted at the time by the Civic Trust, was never realised, the victim of London's reorganisation into 33 boroughs with the London County Council transferring the open spaces to a new Lea Valley Park Authority.

The current Olympic legacy plans for the press and broadcasting centre conversion to *i-City* (now rebranded *Here East*) with BT Sport, Google and technology universities, and for the import of a 'cultural hub' for outposts of the V&A museum and UCL, and possibly Sadlers Wells and even the US Smithsonian Institution – provide the post-modern equivalents, but in a 'public-private hybrid' form.⁵⁵ The V&A (with failed attempts at introducing Libeskind's radical architectural extension in South Kensington and an 'ethnic' outpost in Bradford 'V&A of the North'), and UCL's foray into Middle East Higher Education and cultural developments in Qatar for example, underline the global cultural brand agenda promoted by the Mayor for the Olympic site, which contrasts with the community cultures of Stratford and small creative firms and practising artists who have inhabited this sub-region for many years.

The unfolding Olympic redevelopment confirms

what Littlewood feared would be an assemblage of dated, ageing stadiums and 'new facadist' buildings that disguise their otherwise traditional purpose and form, e.g. rectangular swimming pools and sport halls. The velodrome perhaps achieves the aesthetic form and profile that reflects its function, although replacing what was the existing Eastway track, whereas the lack of a legacy plan for the Aquatic Centre has meant that its internal design and operation is less than ideal (and no substitute for traditional municipal pools, several of which have closed in Newham and other host boroughs). User access to this centre – best viewed from a distance – is also awkward and illegible. A blue film has had to be retrofitted to reduce the glare which meant that lifeguards could not see swimmers underwater. Likewise the absence of a planned legacy use/operator for the main stadium, and political reluctance to lose its secondary athletics usage, have both delayed and added public costs to the post-event conversion to West Ham FC's new home from 2016. Littlewood's criticism of mono-use stadiums is still valid given their empty state most of the time – no legacy narrative can reconcile this – compared with a multi-use and flexible structure and concept. How this new sustainable environment will transform on match days with the incumbent communities and Park users also remains to be seen, but experience of new stadiums in dense urban areas (e.g. Arsenal's Emirates Stadium in Holloway and 'new' Wembley) risks the serious loss of amenity and access to residents and other users.

Conclusion

Any conclusions from this ongoing development process are, as my introduction states, contingent. However, the regime and references on which this masterplanned and politically motivated Olympic regeneration venture has been based, are more familiar. This grand piece of urban design strains to keep its coherence as exigencies and political imperatives take over. The Olympian visions necessary to maintain this trajectory continue to rely on hyperbole and over-optimistic forecasts – of jobs, investment, homes and community. Returning to some principles, Alexander's three tenets of urban design provide the opportunity to benchmark the Olympic regeneration to date:⁵⁶

Firstly, urban design must not be an act of tabula rasa imposition of a form designed remotely. It must understand, respect, and seek to improve upon the existing conditions.

Here, the early Olympic masterplans foreground the aerial/top-down perspective, which recurs throughout the process, combining futuristic images overlaid on the landscape which has been dramatically altered. Designers/planners of all types claim to have improved on existing conditions, although these were characterised as 'past help', so 'degenerated' as to require radical surgery. The area already supported many green and natural spaces (albeit neglected by the city, local and water authorities who have embraced the

Olympic project), while town centre and local area regeneration was already under way, pre-Olympics and commercial developments now exploit the publicly funded Olympic Park backdrop/amenity. Alexander again:

Secondly, urban design must incorporate the decisions, needs and the local stakeholders, as a matter not only of fairness, but also of the intrinsic quality of the result.

Given the scenario and conflicting demands, contractual obligations and political imperatives, this aspect was, and continues to be, problematic. Efforts and mechanisms used to support genuine consultation went further than most schemes but, at this scale, consensus-building is limited. This suggests that the scale was too complex and variable – more focused community-based urban 'quarters' with resident-supported schemes and standards set earlier on would have provided a greater sense of ownership and trust in the outcome – where confidence is currently questionable, even by new residents of legacy housing who now see high-rise planning applications and compromises to the 'plan' (for example Manhattan Loft's 42-storey tower and Telford Homes' 'Stratosphere'), and the development of sites and heritage buildings in Hackney Wick conservation area. As Clarke notes: 'buildings occupy (scarce) space. If the location, not the building, becomes more valuable than the existing building prevents the realization of that value [...] it is only through the destruction of old values in the built environment that new values can be created.'⁵⁷

Thirdly and above all, urban design must be a generative process, from which a form will emerge – one that cannot be pre-planned or standardised, but will of necessity be, at least in some key respects, local and unique.

This more organic, incremental approach does not sit well with the pressures of event-based regeneration and the funding models that rely on short-term market decisions and conditions. It is worth noting that, in other mega-event-based regeneration projects such as Barcelona (1992 Olympics) and Lisbon (1996 EXPO), 'legacy' redevelopment has taken place over a much longer time period. The architecture and urban design that have been produced thus far in London are devoid of much vernacular or local distinctiveness. 'Generative design' in contemporary built environment practice looks increasingly to virtual modelling in masterplanning and visualisations which are at odds with the actual lived spaces and the landscapes they produce. The challenge therefore for urban design praxis driven by these land-use imperatives – i.e. housing and consumption – is to reach an optimum balance between organic, inclusive spatial design and creative buildings and spaces that are appropriate and lasting enough to meet community and user needs over time. As P. W. Clarke reminds us: 'the built environment is long-lived, difficult to alter, space specific, and absorbs large aggregates of capital'.⁵⁸ This suggests that neither professional masterplanner, urban designer nor

politician alone should control this urban visioning and design process, whilst the current design tools employed need fundamental review and a more interdisciplinary approach.⁵⁹

Would you start from here? Basing the scale of regeneration envisaged on the premise of an Olympic Games with all the attendant structures and assemblages (governance, physical, financial) – the answer would probably be: no. This explains in part the schizophrenic nature of the building and landscaping, and the zonal separations that are being created, and the substantial efforts that design and engineering teams have made at all levels to maintain both the masterplanned vision and legacy aspirations. It seems that once the project turns from area regeneration to one of destination and placemaking, designers are challenged in working with confidence over who or what they are designing for ('context', above). Hertzberger maintains that: 'In the design of each building, the architect must constantly bear in

mind that the users must have the freedom to decide for themselves how they want to use each part, each space [...] the measure of success is the way that spaces are used, the diversity of activities which they attract, and the opportunities they provide for creative reinterpretation.'⁶⁰ One step that would improve the ownership and adaptability of this manufactured space as it develops and literally fills up, is to increase resident engagement and power over the legacy; as Kunzmann proposes, 'strengthening the cultural dimension in urban and regional development',⁶¹ and in local schemes, leaving *unplanned* space for cultural creativity and civic engagement.

So, when it comes down to it, sustainable regeneration and the hybrid professional practices of architecture, masterplanning and urban design, rest on matters of power over space, how it is imagined, used and appropriated, as much as the design and *a priori* visions that drive the original concept and purpose.

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